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Randolph AFB, Texas



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Bush is open to base closure list

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Gary Martin
Express-News Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — President Bush on Thursday endorsed a list of base closures that would shutter 22 major military installations, including three in Texas, and realign 33 others for an estimated savings of \$35.5 billion.

Bush accepted the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission's recommendations in a letter to Congress, which now has 45 days to reject the proposals or allow them to become law.

Under the proposal, San Antonio would see the Air Force leave Brooks City-Base and a major realignment at Lackland AFB, including the closure of Wilford Hall Medical Center.

Those losses would be offset by thousands of jobs created by Pentagon plans to turn Fort Sam Houston into a center for military medical training, and transform Brooke Army Medical Center into one of two national medical centers.

Other Texas bases that would close include Ingleside Naval Station and the Army's Lone Star Ammunition Plant in Texarkana.

The base closure commission trimmed the Pentagon's \$48.8 billion request, sparing several major installations from closure, including Red River Army Depot in Texarkana.

But Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld urged the president to accept the panel's revisions, and Bush signaled in August that he would accept final decisions by the commission to keep the process from becoming politicized.

Bush had until Sept. 23 to either accept the list or send the proposals back to the panel for revision. His early action on the proposals comes as his administration is grappling with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Nonetheless, Bush's decision to accept the base closure list was not surprising.

"It shows his resolve in approving it, instead of waiting for the last possible minute," said Paul Taibl with Business Executives for National Security.

"It was an easy decision, since he made it in advance, and it's one less thing the White House has to concern itself with, since they have completed their part of the process," Taibl said.

Presidential approval moves the list to Congress, which approved base closure proposals in four previous rounds, 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995.

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Of the 190 bases the Pentagon wanted closed, the BRAC panel spared 24, amended 45 recommendations and left 119 decisions intact.

Overall, the BRAC panel approved 86 percent of the Pentagon proposals, for a savings of \$35.5 billion over 20 years.

Retired Brig. Gen. John Jernigan, who led a San Antonio military task force, predicted presidential acceptance with the panel's final recommendation.

Despite the decision to pull Air Force operations out of Brooks, San Antonio fared well in the base closure process, a complete turnaround from 1995 when BRAC closed Kelly AFB and eliminated 10,000 civilian jobs.

Pentagon plans to consolidate medical training across the service branches at Fort Sam Houston and locate a regional medical complex at Brooke Army Medical Center will bring 9,000 additional personnel to the San Antonio base and facility.

Meanwhile, legal battles over proposals to close or realign Air National Guard bases and assets threaten to tie the process up in federal court.

Several states have sued the Pentagon over base closure proposals that impact Guard facilities, and federal courts in Tennessee and Connecticut have issued injunctions that prevent BRAC decisions from being implemented.

Bush acknowledged the ongoing legal battles in his letter to Congress.

The president forwarded the base closure list to lawmakers without comment.

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AETC News Clips

Air Force Times



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September 19, 2005

Delayed response

Katrina shows military's assets are necessary

By David R. Welling

We have been told we are undergoing a transformation in the military, that we have far too many bases, too many troops, too many hospitals.

We've been told the war of the future will be about unmanned airplanes and sexy weapon systems that will be so much more effective that we will just not need all the infrastructure and personnel of the past.

So we see plans to get rid of thousands of junior officers in the Air Force and we read of plans to close bases, affecting thousands of jobs and tens of thousands of lives. In a perfect world, such plans make good sense. Nobody wants to see valuable tax dollars go to waste, and certainly some of the bases are superfluous.

But the big question, as I see it, is the unanticipated event. It might be terrorist-driven. It might be weather-related. It might be an earthquake or a tsunami.

The unanticipated event always causes confusion, panic and uncertainty. We are learning this principle the hard way, right now, with Hurricane Katrina.

To fix Katrina's mess, this is what we need: We need law enforcers. We need medical care. We need food, water, shelter, communication, transportation.

Where can such assets be found? It can only be the military. The compelling cry from New Orleans, right now, is that "we need to send in the troops!"

But we just do not have limitless supplies of troops. We are fighting a difficult war, thousands of miles away, with many of them.

Others are deployed all over, fully engaged in important work. We no longer have the luxury of a surplus of troops. We are stretched thin.

We ought to have a more robust safety net out there. Our bases, our people, our hospitals, our airlift — all are life-saving and important assets to our country.

It is every bit as legitimate a Defense Department responsibility to save lives in Louisiana as it is to drop bombs in Iraq.

We need robust capabilities to respond to these huge challenges, and no other organization on earth has those capabilities. We need to be careful not to dismantle the systems that allow us to properly respond, including our medical corps.

We ought to be very concerned, thus far, as we consider our response to the Katrina victims.

I believe that a reason for our delayed response has been our weakened, diluted military.

Air Force Times
19 Sep 05 Edition
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Air Force Times



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We can do better. We should try to err on the side of a modest surplus of assets.

A little wiggle room will allow us all to sleep better.

The writer is a retired colonel who was a surgeon in the Air Force for 30 years.



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Air Force Times



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MASTER SGT. LANCE CHEUNG, AIR FORCE

Capt. Mike Dixon and Staff Sgt. Lina Gamez from Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, comfort a patient who was evacuated from New Orleans on Sept. 1 aboard a C-17 Globemaster III with a crew from McChord Air Force Base, Wash.



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Air Force Times



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September 19, 2005

News briefs

Post-hurricane nuptials

Hurricane Katrina put many plans on hold.

But at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., an airman and his girlfriend emerged after the storm's chaos determined not to let the wreckage and ruin get in the way of their wedding.

In fact, Tech. Sgt. Daniel McMullen of the 335th Training Squadron and his girlfriend of three years, LaVerne Hawkins, even moved up their special day — from Sept. 8 to Sept. 3, just five days after Katrina made landfall.

The two exchanged vows outside one of the seven shelters the base used to house people since the hurricane struck.

“We had the marriage license, and we could have went to a justice of the peace, but we both figured why wait? Let's do it right now,” Hawkins said.

Wedding guests shared a shelter with the couple and dressed appropriately for the occasion — groomsmen wore reflective safety belts and bridesmaids wore reflective safety vests.

McMullen said the wedding was more meaningful because the people he had been with through the hurricane were a part of it.

“I've shared a lot with these folks over the last eight days,” McMullen said. “We all survived the storm together.”



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Air Force Times



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Opinion Letters



AIR FORCE

Hurricane Katrina flooded parts of Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Miss. A reader suggests that Keesler be closed and its mission transferred to Cannon Air Force Base, N.M.

Air Force Times
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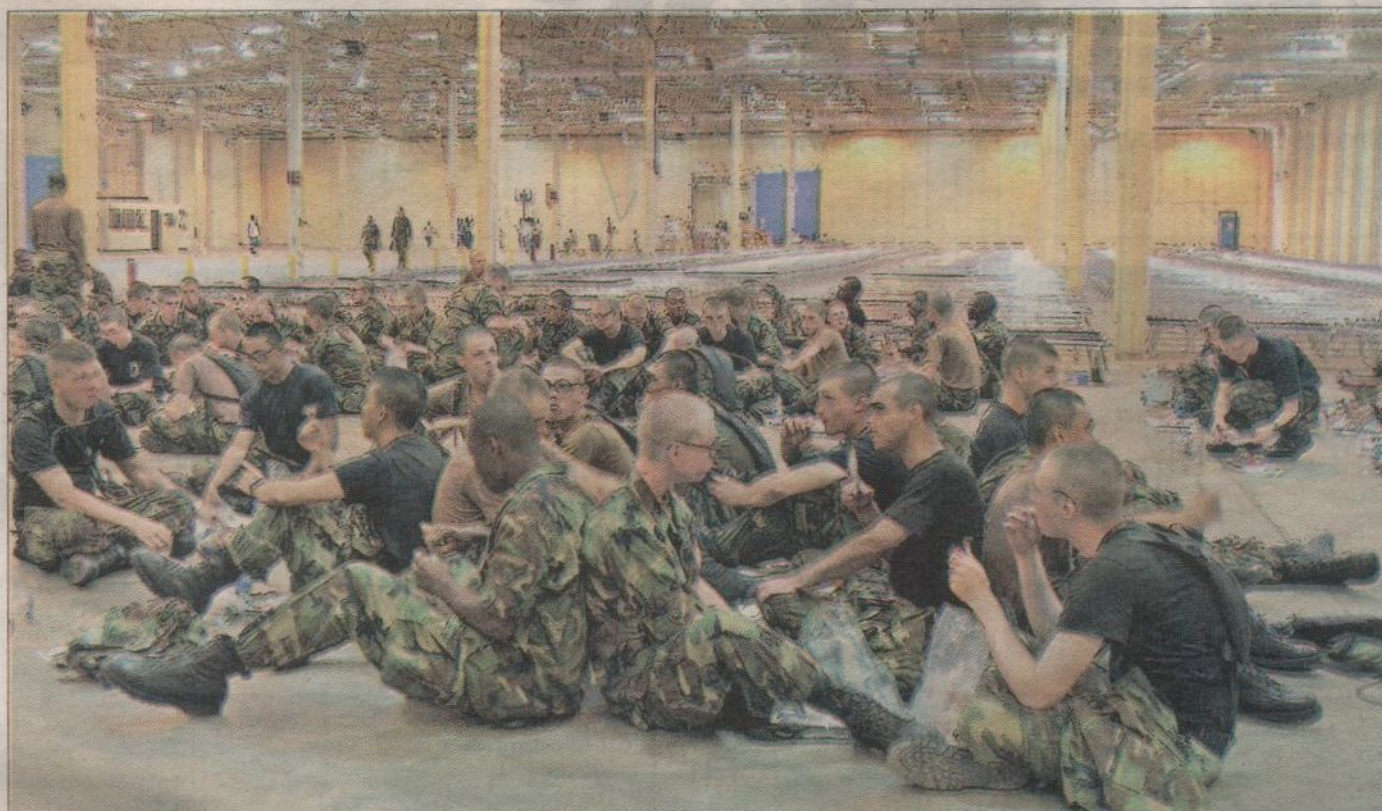
Air Force Times



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AirForceTimes this week



TECH. SGT. MARK BOROSCH, AIR FORCE

Texas feels the storm

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Airmen from various basic training squadrons at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio take a break from setting up temporary quarters for Hurricane Katrina evacuees at nearby Kelly Field. The airmen helped process thousands of people evacuated from New Orleans.

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Keesler AFB, Miss.



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Air Force still may make reductions at Keesler hospital, newspaper reports

Associated Press

BILOXI, Miss. - The military may still scale back operations at the hospital at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi despite what many believed was a base closing commission's decision to keep it open as a full service medical center, a newspaper reported Thursday.

The Sun Herald reported it had received an Air Force document that showed the Keesler hospital could be reclassified as a "community hospital." The Air Force said in the document that it believes the language in the Base Realignment and Closure Commission decision would allow that change.

Under the Air Force definition of a community hospital, Keesler would lose its graduate medical education program, which trains more than 100 doctors and nurses per year, the newspaper said.

Brig. Gen. Jim Dougherty, commander of Keesler Medical Center, said he had seen the document. Dougherty said he was baffled by media reports at the time that said the hospital had been spared.

"When we heard it, listening to TV, we scratched our heads and said has anybody heard of this definition before, because it was something new to us. It wasn't our business to know this stuff, working with the commission's definition," Dougherty said. "Subsequently, when they made their amendment, we searched through their minutes and figured it out, but that was after the fact."

When Hurricane Katrina hit Aug. 29, the Keesler hospital took flooding in the first floor and lost its backup generator. Both pharmacies were damaged and the hospital lost millions of dollars in pharmaceuticals stored there.

Dougherty said hospital personnel have discussed the plan being floated by the Air Force. He said military personnel deal with "contingency plans" on a regular basis, and that no decision regarding Keesler is final until it is signed by the president.

Dougherty said the BRAC commissioners can make changes to the ruling before the report is given to the president.

Retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Clark Griffith, who fought the Department of Defense recommendation to scale back Keesler to a super clinic, said the confusion lies with the difference between what the Air Force defines as a community hospital and the BRAC commission's idea of a community hospital.

Griffith questioned the Air Force's ability to define a "community hospital."

"It is a technical foul because if in fact they wanted to scale Keesler back more than the report and they wanted to do away with the graduate medical education program, they had to have an add," Griffith said.

Brian Martin, policy director for U.S. Rep. Gene Taylor, D-Miss., said Taylor's office was not prepared to comment on the Air Force plan because they were just getting word of it. Martin said Taylor and the rest of the congressional delegation expect to meet with Air Force officials by the end of the week.

Lee Youngblood, a spokesman for Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss., said they had heard some rumors regarding the Keesler situation, but his office had been tied up working with issues related to Hurricane Katrina, which underscores the need for the hospital.

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Keesler AFB, Miss.



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"The senator believes a community hospital should mean having the same services as prior to BRAC and prior to Katrina. Considering the hurricane, that is even more reason to keep this facility intact," Youngblood told the newspaper.

Griffith said the timing of the Air Force recommendation is poor. The BRAC commission completed its work on Aug. 25, three days before Katrina struck. The Air Force plan has developed since then.

"There is something about picking on a cripple that doesn't set well. Now you're adding to the misery," Griffith said. "It is not good timing. This is not something within their purview to do."

The Air Force recommendation, according to The Sun Herald, could eliminate more than 200 civilian and more than 400 military jobs. It could reduce the number of available beds from 90 to 42 and operating rooms from 16 to four.

The Sun Herald
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Lackland AFB, Texas



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Air Force officer pleads guilty to trying to have wife killed

By T.A. BADGER
Associated Press writer

LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE, Texas -- A military lawyer accused of trying to hire a hit man to kill his wife by opening fire on her and others in her crowded office pleaded guilty Tuesday to attempted premeditated murder.

Air Force Capt. Barry Brown pleaded guilty before his trial was to begin on charges of attempting to arrange the slaying with the help of a paralegal he was having an affair with. His wife, Irene Brown, was not injured in the plot that surfaced in March when an informant contacted law officers.

"There was no justification, no excuse for the actions that I took," Brown told the judge. "I knew there were other options at the time. I weighed those options and chose poorly."

Sentencing was set to begin Tuesday afternoon for Brown, who faces a maximum life in military prison. He also pleaded guilty to improper fraternization with an enlisted person.

According to a statement signed by Brown, the paralegal, Staff Sgt. Ramona Greiner, approached a man she knew and lined up the meeting with Brown to arrange the slaying.

The man contacted police, then met with Brown at a park to discuss details of the purported hit. Police had placed microphones at a picnic table and then videotaped the meeting.

During the meeting, according to Brown's statement, he agreed to pay \$25,000 for the hit. He gave the man three photos of his wife and a down payment of \$280.

According to the statement, Brown suggested that the man open fire on his wife while she was at work at a Child Protective Services office in San Antonio. He suggested that the killing would be harder to trace if Irene Brown was one of several people killed.

Greiner faces trial next week. She was charged in May with conspiracy to commit premeditated murder, solicitation to commit murder and dereliction of duty.

Greiner and Brown, who worked in the Staff Judge Advocate's office at Lackland, had what Brown called in court an "improper relationship."

Associated Press
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Sheppard AFB, Texas



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Bush backs BRAC

Congress next in line to view, approve list

By Tara Copp/Scripps Howard News Service
September 16, 2005, Page 1A

WASHINGTON - President Bush approved the BRAC commission's 2005 findings Thursday, sending the full report, unaltered, on to Congress.

"I certify that I approve all the recommendations contained in the commission's report," Bush said in a prepared statement sent out of the White House late Thursday afternoon.

For Wichita Falls, the move merely confirms losses, said Tim Chase, president of the Board of Commerce & Industry.

"This is exactly what the process called for," he said of the president's action. "I don't think anything changes on our part."

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission cut more than 2,300 jobs at Sheppard Air Force Base, positions in basic and specialty enlisted training that will go to the new San Antonio Regional Medical Center as part of a major overhaul of the nation's military medical community.

The medical realignment means Wichita Falls stands to lose an estimated 2,378 jobs directly tied to Sheppard; another 1,585 indirect jobs are also slated to be cut. In all, it would be about 4.26 percent of the area's employment, according to the Pentagon. Also, about 500 maintenance and flight-training jobs earmarked for Sheppard will go instead to Eglin Air Force Base in Florida to assist the new Joint Strike Fighter site.

The impact may be even less, though.

Local leaders with the Wichita Falls Area Military Affairs Committee recently projected direct job losses to be 1,784 based on current levels at the base. Along with indirect losses, the job reduction would hit 2,961, or about 1,000 fewer job losses than the Pentagon's estimate.

The four-month, frenetically paced 2005 BRAC round was launched by the Pentagon in May with the release of hundreds of bases nationwide recommended for closure or realignment. It is estimated to save \$37 billion in reduced infrastructure and personnel costs over the next 20 years.

It is the fifth such base closure round since 1988, and initially would have closed 33 bases, the most major bases in a single round to date. The four previous BRAC rounds, in 1998, 1991, 1993 and 1995, closed a total of 97 major bases.

But the independent BRAC panel stepped in on a number of those recommendations, and questioned the Pentagon's initial estimated savings of \$48 billion. The BRAC panel's own analysis showed that if you took out personnel costs - because they argued not all the jobs "lost" would actually be phased out - the actual savings would only be \$14 billion.

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Sheppard AFB, Texas



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On top of questioning several of the Pentagon's proposed closures, the BRAC commissioners added a few additional closures they thought the Pentagon had missed. In the end, of the 33 initial major closure recommendations, 22 major bases ended up on BRAC's final closure list. When the major closures are added to the hundreds of smaller recommendations that the BRAC panel largely approved, however, the panel ended up accepting about the same percentage of Pentagon recommendations as its predecessors had -- about 86 percent.

For Texas bases affected by BRAC, now that this round is nearing an end "we must begin to secure our existing bases for the future and revitalize those whose doors will be closing," said Chris Paulitz, a spokesman for Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison.

Chris Hellman, a defense analyst with the Washington, D.C., based Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, said the panel was right on track with previous rounds, and that despite some Pentagon objections to the survival of a few bases, they got most of what they wanted.

"They (the Pentagon) grumbled, but it was grumbling over individual decisions," Hellman said. "They reaped a substantial portion of their savings."

Next, Congress has 45 days to approve the report or reject it in its entirety. Hellman said he did not see any real possibility that Congress would reject the list, as so many of the major bases that had been at risk were spared. Hellman said the only possibility he sees for rejection of the list might be based on the proposed reductions of Reserve and National Guard end strength and positioning, particularly in light of Hurricane Katrina. But he said he thought that too was unlikely, as many of the bases affected by both BRAC and the Hurricane still have several years to begin any sort of closure process.

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Vance AFB, Okla.



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City begins process of giving land to Vance AFB

The Enid News & Eagle, Page A11

By Jeff Mullin, Senior Writer

15 September, 2005

Just two days before the 113th anniversary of the Cherokee Strip Land Run, some of that land again has changed hands, but this time there wasn't a horse in sight.

On Wednesday morning Enid Mayor Ernie Currier gave 71st Flying Training Wing Commander Col. Bryan Benson paperwork deeding 132 acres of land to the Air Force. At almost the same time, former mayor Mike Cooper, chairman of Vance Development Authority and Oklahoma Strategic Military Planning Commission, delivered copies of the same paperwork to Richard Jenkins, chief of the Air Force's Real Property Agency in Washington.

"The city has taken the first steps in turning that land over to the Air Force," said Currier.

"This is part of our ongoing protection and enhancement efforts on behalf of Vance Air Force Base," said Cooper.

Last October, the city leased the land, located north of Eisenhower Elementary School, to the Air Force. City officials would simply have given the land to Vance at that time, but were prevented from doing so since the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure round was coming up.

"We didn't want it to look like we were trying to BRAC-proof ourselves by giving them the land then," said Cooper.

"We tried to lease it to them at a good price, like \$1 a year or something, but we couldn't do that because of the BRAC issue," said Currier. "They had to pay market value for the property."

Since the 2005 BRAC commission's report went to President Bush last week, the city is now free to deed the land to the Air Force.

The unsolicited offer must now be reviewed by officials at the Pentagon and at Air Education and Training Command headquarters at Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio. That process is expected to take 30 to 45 days, when the transaction, if it is approved at all levels, will become official.

"This gives the Air Force control of that whole area," said Cooper. "They can decide as they develop their Vision 2025 plan how they want to develop it. They may look to expand housing there."

"Every citizen can take pride in the fact that, over and over we have shown our willingness to work with Vance to help enhance their mission," said Currier. "But Vance has showed willingness to work with us, too. It is a partnership, it is never one-sided."

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